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University of Dayton

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NEWS



Thursday December 10, 2015

A Family's Donation

A Nativity display carried to the United States by an Italian immigrant in the early 1900s, expanded in 90 years of collecting by his family and recently donated to the University of Dayton, is now on display.

The Nativity is featured on the second floor of Roesch Library on the University of Dayton campus as part of “At the Manger: Christmas and Beyond,” the University’s annual display of Nativity scenes from the collection of the Marian Library. The exhibit runs through Jan. 24.

The “Presipio della famiglia di Antonio Lucente” was assembled during the last 90 years, according Antonette Lucente, a member of the Anthony J. Lucente, Sr., family, which donated the set to the library. It features more than 100 figures in a mountain scene, including musicians, shepherds and a flying angel.

“When my grandfather, Salvatore Lucente, immigrated to the United States from Cutro in Southern Italy in the early 1900s, he brought with him a small collection of figures,” she said. “He wanted to recreate a tradition of a Nativity scene in his new homeland.”

Over the years, Salvatore and his family, including sons who traveled the world during World War II, added to the collection. The elaborate display Salvatore built each year in a corner of his living room for his family of 16 children was an integral part of the family’s Christmas traditions, eventually drawing other family and friends began to visit to view the Presipio as well.

“When he moved to Florida from Dayton, my grandfather passed the display on to my father, Anthony J. Lucente, Sr., who was entrusted to care for it on behalf of the growing extended family,” Antonette said. “My father then began to build the display each year in our own home. It was a highlight of our Christmas celebrations, and it holds much meaning for us. The children would all have favorite pieces and would carefully place the figure of baby Jesus in the crib on Christmas Eve.

“My father passed away in 1986 and we have continued the tradition over the years,” she said.

“Ultimately, my mother and our family decided that many more people would be able to enjoy and appreciate the beautiful heritage and story each year if it were placed into a venue that more visitors could access. The University of Dayton, with its strong tradition of displaying Nativity sets, was a perfect fit.

“My brothers and sisters and some of Anthony’s grandchildren traveled to Dayton from all over the country recently to build the final display that would be passed on the University of Dayton,” she said. “It was a bittersweet moment for the family and for my mother, Eileen R. Lucente, particularly, but we feel my father and grandfather would be pleased to see the Presipio safely preserved and displayed for generations to come.”

At the Manger is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, and 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. It will be closed for holidays on Dec. 24, 25 and 31; and Jan. 1 and 18.

For more information on exhibits, hours, directions and parking, visit <http://udayton.edu/libraries/manger> or call 937-229-4265. Guided group tours for six or more are available on request by calling 937-229-4214.

For more information, contact Meagan Pant, assistant director of media relations, at 937-229-3256 or mpant1@udayton.edu.